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PRESS RELEASE

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REPRESENTATIVES MARKEY, TIERNEY & AND
MEEHAN DEMAND AN END TO NRC SECRECY
LETTER TO NRC REQUESTS ANSWERS ON SEABROOK SECURITY
AND REQUESTS BRIEFING

WASHINGTON, DC – Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the panel which oversees nuclear reactors, Representative Martin T. Meehan (D-MA), a Member of the Armed Services Committee and Representative John F. Tierney (D-MA), a Member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Oversight today sent a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding security at the Seabrook nuclear power plant protesting the NRC's failure to adequately respond to earlier correspondence.

"The NRC's response to our queries is unacceptable," said Rep. Markey. "The NRC is once again hiding behind a cloak of secrecy to withhold information from Members of Congress and the public regarding security vulnerabilities at nuclear reactors that, if exploited by terrorists, could harm residents of Massachusetts."

"We were pleased to receive NRC's assurances that they will continue to carry out inspections of and initiate any needed enforcement actions against the Seabrook Station nuclear power plant. In our role as Members of Congress and overseers of NRC's activities, we believe that further investigation and explanation is warranted. We insist NRC be forthcoming with more information," said Rep. Tierney.

"The millions of people who live in close proximity to the Seabrook reactor deserve straightforward answers from the NRC about what is being done to guarantee their safety. In this era of terrorist threats on American soil, it is intolerable for public concerns about Seabrook's safety to go unaddressed," said Rep. Meehan.

In May and June, 2005, Reps. Markey, Meehan and Tierney sent several letters to the NRC based on media reports and documents obtained from whistleblowers indicating that an NRC inspection of security

at the Seabrook nuclear power plant revealed numerous serious security flaws, including an inoperable perimeter fence, security cameras that provided no coverage or failed to work, security officials employed at the facility who have no security expertise, and security guards being forced to work excessive amounts of overtime in violation of NRC regulations. Please see the following links below for correspondence Rep. Markey sent on these matters:

http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_ltr050525.pdf

http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_ltr050601.pdf

http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_ltr050607.pdf

On July 11, the NRC provided a response to this correspondence which essentially refused to provide any specific responses to the Congressmen's questions. The response stated that "NRC does not make the details of security inspections publicly available to prevent release of any security information that could be useful to a potential adversary."

According to documents obtained by Representative Markey (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_resp041122.pdf and http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_attach6.pdf), on March 29, 2004, NRC Commissioners approved a new policy to withhold all security-related information from the public and close security-related meetings of the Commission to all but the nuclear industry - even when the information in question is unclassified. Commission voting records indicate that while NRC staff recommended a more flexible policy on releasing this sort of information to the public, the Commission rejected the staff's recommendations in favor of a much more restrictive policy. At least some of the Commission's objections appear to stem from a concern that it might be costly and time consuming to provide this information to the public. For example, in his comments explaining why he rejected the staff's recommendation, Commissioner McGaffigan stated that the staff recommendation would have required more, not less staff time because when the security-related information was posted, "the staff will be pressed to reveal more information and to assure the public that despite these [security] deficiencies, the plant should not be shut down. Congressmen will feel compelled to write letters. Reporters will feel compelled to seek safeguards information. This will be a fool's errand, carried out time and time again, consuming staff and Commission resources in large quantities. By comparison, Option 5's closed system will consume far fewer resources." The Commission's refusal to provide information even to Members of Congress appears to be consistent with this new, restrictive and inappropriate policy. In March 2005, Representative Markey requested that the NRC Inspector General conduct an investigation into the NRC's use of secrecy (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_attach6.pdf).

The letter released today continues to insist on the NRC providing detailed and specific responses to the Congressmen's questions, and in addition, requests a briefing to discuss the security problems identified at the Seabrook nuclear reactor.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the letter, please see www.house.gov/markey

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